



Curing Smartphone Addiction

By Dan Richards
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Many of us have a love-hate relationship with our smartphone.

We love the fact that it makes us more efficient. We hate the extent to which it controls us.

But there's a deeper, more fundamental problem at play here – for some people, smartphones lead not only to distraction but to burnout and reduced motivation. Ultimately, they reduce productivity rather than increase it.



And it gets worse. A growing number of users' relationship with their smartphone fits the classic definition of addiction, causing the same outcomes as alcoholism, drug use, gambling or overeating ... obsessive preoccupation, continued use despite negative consequences and denial. Extreme smartphone use meets another criterion for addiction – immediate gratification and short-term rewards, coupled with delayed negative effects and long-term costs.

Happily, there is a solution. Recent research has unveiled a simple strategy that allows users to enjoy the benefits of smartphones while significantly reducing the negative effects.

Addressing always-on fatigue

Harvard Business School faculty member Leslie Perrow has studied this issue at length. And in her recent book, *Sleeping with Your Smartphone: How to Break the 24-7 Habit and Change the Way You Work*, she described a successful experiment that addressed the mental fatigue that accompanies an always-on psyche.

The research was conducted with high-powered consultants at the strategy firm Boston Consulting Group, implementing something called predictable time off (PTO). The essence of PTO is to agree to afternoons or evenings completely cut off from work and wireless devices, predetermined blackout periods when emails are neither sent nor read and with uninterrupted time periods that allow for greater focus.



Four years later, what started off with one team had spread to 900 teams in 30 countries. The reason was because what happened to key attitudes among participants in the PTO experiment:

	PTO participants	Non participants
Excited to start work in the morning	51%	27%
Satisfied with their job	72%	49%
Satisfied with work life balance	54%	38%

As you think about your own situation and that of your team, consider whether predictable time off could function for you in the same way that it did for Boston Consulting Group – both at work and at home. By implementing this one simple strategy, you could become happier and more effective in both your business and your personal life.

And there's another benefit also: You could avoid being viewed as a "*hapless zombie*" – a phrase used in a very funny April article in the *Wall Street Journal* on the impact of the no-smartphone rule at the U.S. Masters golf tournament. Here's how the article began:

Navigating a no-phone zone

"Everybody knows that smart phones have inhaled civilization; sure, there's a certain, breathtaking level of convenience, and Boggle for the iPhone deserves a Nobel Prize, but it's time to admit that we're all incurably addicted, that we look like hapless zombies pecking at them all day, and would probably be at least 80% happier if we drove to the nearest bridge and chucked it in the river. We're losing our ability to socialize and even speak—phones ruin dinners, meetings, weddings and even honeymoons, to say nothing of the deadly crazies who break them out in the driver's seat.

Phones have also sucked energy out of sporting events; you can't go to a game without seeing hundreds of fans with their faces buried in tiny screens, sending texts and Tweets and taking horrible photos to prove on Facebook they're actually there."

Here's a [link](#) to the full Wall Street Journal article.

And click [here](#) for an article describing the PTO research.



[Dan Richards](#) conducts programs to help advisors gain and retain clients and is an award winning faculty member in the MBA program at the University of Toronto. To see more of his written and video commentaries, go to www.clientinsights.ca. Use A555A for the rep and dealer code to register for website access.

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